

# TEACHING BUSINESS GERMAN AND REGIONAL STUDIES THROUGH NOVELS

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This article is an extension and development of my earlier article *Using Literature to Teach Cross-Cultural Management: A German Perspective* (Bloch 1996). In that article, I described the concept of using literature to teach culture and the various benefits to instructors and students, and I surveyed, in a general fashion, the teaching methods. I also looked briefly at a fairly extensive number of novels and other sources which can be used to good effect. In this article, I sum up the overall rationale and focus specifically on three novels which I believe are particularly well-suited to teaching Business German and Regional Studies. The basic difference between this article and the previous one is that this one deals in relative depth with

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three works only, rather than providing a wide-ranging survey. Business German can be defined as teaching the language, related cultural and other cross-disciplinary issues in a business, rather than a general or language and literature context. It is thus the commercial framework and ambience that converts a standard German course into *Wirtschaftsdeutsch*. Clearly, novels or parts thereof can provide this ambience, enabling students to strengthen not only their Business German, but knowledge of various other aspects of German commerce and life as well. Geography, history, politics, general and business culture and practice, perceptions of foreigners, and so on are all conveyed in a certain type of fictional work. The instructor can shift and balance the emphasis between Business German and Regional Studies as required.

I believe that the novels dealt with in this article are more in the mould of regional studies than cross-cultural management, although most certainly, elements of the latter do apply as well. The emphasis can be shifted *in the classroom* between regional studies and cross-cultural management, but the nature of the novels themselves tends to provide immediate and direct "information" about Germany rather than anything comparative.

Emphasis is also placed on fundamental business issues and concepts rather than on literary analysis. It is not the intention here to go into great detail on any of the novels, but rather to highlight their value in terms of the objectives of the article. I am confident that readers will find this approach to conform best to the needs and preferences of commerce students, or those of humanities students desiring some business input into the curriculum. However, the exact approach taken must naturally be adapted to each specific group. There is some precedent in business literature of using literature to convey business precepts and theories, but this is mainly in the area of ethics. With respect to Business German and Regional Studies, we find ourselves in what is in essence an unexplored field.

## The Basic Rationale

There is general consensus in the literature that Business German requires a blend of pure language training, commercial vocabulary and idiom and cross-cultural issues including regional study. Texts on Business German and books on "Doing Business in Germany" provide these criteria, but can be well supplemented and enriched by the judicious use of literature. Particularly with respect to Regional Studies, novels cannot provide anything near the full range of material that needs to be covered. Thus, the use of novels is, in essence, a supplementary methodology and is unlikely ever to replace the clear and comprehensive

**Business German requires a blend of pure language training, commercial vocabulary and idiom and cross-cultural issues. Standard texts can be supplemented and enriched by the judicious use of literature which portrays business situations.**

structure of a more conventional text. The fundamental benefit, on the other hand, is that novels in particular (and some short stories) have a vivacity and life which goes way beyond that which the conventional texts can offer. Literature conveys the atmosphere, ethos, life and even linguistic element of German life in a quite unique fashion, and provides a subjective and aesthetic view of reality which may be extremely illuminating and stimulating. Also, given the fact that so many *Germanisten* are trained in literature, including many teaching Business German, using novels in the process is a perfect way of combining the talents and training of the teacher with the needs and preferences of the student.

It is not essential to use books with a business theme, because part of the objective is to convey culture in the broader context (see Bloch, 1996). However, it is probably advisable to use a novel with a business element, and preferably a fairly strong one. The basic precondition is that students have a fairly high

level of linguistic competence; they really ought to be at an advanced rather than an intermediate level. Unless students are able to read a novel with reasonable ease, the process is likely to be unwieldy and laborious, negating much of the potential benefit.

Depending on the students' linguistic skills, it is also not necessary that students read an entire book; selected extracts or chapters may be quite sufficient. In fact, this is, I believe, a fundamental point; it is unnecessary (although obviously desirable when feasible and practical) for students to read the full work. The whole process of using novels may depend on accepting this principle. Particularly where English translations and plot summaries are available, students may read only those parts of the work which are relevant to business or provide the requisite cultural and Regional-Studies insights. Alternatively, the instructor can fill in the gaps in the story. In this respect, English translation can also play a role especially in supplementing the German original, but when the objective is to teach *the language*, translations clearly have little relevance. Modern novels would tend to provide more immediate and obvious Regional Studies benefits, but even works prior to the twentieth century can be just as useful with respect to language and conveying the nature of the German work ethic, "soul and psyche," etc.

In order to illustrate the principles outlined above, I have selected three novels: Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks*, Lion Feuchtwanger's *Die Geschwister Oppermann*, and Leonie Ossowski's *Die Maklerin*. It is, in fact, not at all easy to find novels with a commercial theme, and these three do so exceptionally well. (One could use a translation of John Grisham's *The Firm*, but this is not a German original and thus the Regional Studies element disappears totally!) Furthermore, they cut across three eras, the late 18th century, the mid 1930's and the post-war period to the present. The books thus offer different styles of German and insights into different eras. The three novels discussed can also be thought of as an extension of the kind of Business German text which describes various activities of one particular firm. But most of all, they all convey something of the German business ethic, mentality and various aspects of history and regional study, combined with potential for learning about cross-cultural management.

I have devoted the most attention to *Buddenbrooks* by virtue of its literary standing, aesthetic richness and the density of regional studies information that it provides. In term of these same criteria, I have devoted less attention to *Die Geschwister Oppermann* and less still to *Die Maklerin*. This is not to say that one book is necessarily more useful for teaching purposes than another. That depends on the objectives and preferences of both instructor and students.

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## A. Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks*

### The essence

In many respects, *Buddenbrooks* is an excellent, even ideal choice for the teaching of Business German and probably has more to offer with respect to business than any other work of German literature. The obvious drawback of the novel's length is not in fact much of a problem for two reasons. Firstly, English translations are readily available, and secondly, plot summaries are also available in both English and German, from such sources as *The Oxford Companion to German Literature* and *Kindler's Literatur Lexikon*. Such summaries enable students to read just as much of the novel as they or the instructor desire. Where the summary itself is in German, this provides an additional source of Business German. Mann's German is certainly not simple to understand, but then again, this can be compensated for by using segments no longer than students are capable of reading with reasonable ease. For advanced students, it is also useful and stimulating to contrast Mann's with modern German.

**Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks*** *Buddenbrooks* offers the reader a remarkably wide range of themes, including the social history of the bourgeoisie of the nineteenth century and its decline, a portrayal of family life and a picture of business during this period. Holbeche (1988: 244) comments that the history of the Buddenbrooks family is not just a piece of German social history, but a piece of German and European economic history as well. The novel not only describes the decline of the eponymous family, but of patriarchal bourgeoisie in the face of competition from a new and ruthless capitalism (Ludwig, 1979: 9).

Mann is concerned with "the fetish of the firm" and attempts to portray it as precisely and realistically as is feasible within the bounds and constraints of a fictional work. Mann

conducted immaculate and detailed research in order to ensure the accuracy and consistency of the commercial elements of the novel. For instance, his cousin Marty sent him vast amounts of information about the economic life of Lübeck, details of corn prices and so on. He also commented on how an economic decline in the city might occur (Ridley 1987: 22). Mann carried out considerable accounting and financial analysis in order to provide the sums and figures which are presented in the novel. Combined with the precise depiction and integration of historical events and tendencies, *Buddenbrooks* is indeed a remarkably and compelling socio-psychological work which is firmly embedded in the broader context of business.

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A study of *Buddenbrooks* from a business perspective yields considerable material beyond the core book itself. That is, many secondary works on the novel devote considerable attention to things commercial and also delve into the industrial history of Lübeck and Germany at that time. There is virtually an infinite amount of literature on the book, both in German and English. This means that a detailed study of the characters, circumstances, the period of history it covers, the language used and so on is possible, and that the emphasis can be placed on English or German according to the preferences of the instructor and/or students. This is a substantial difference between *Buddenbrooks* and, say, *Die Maklerin*, which simply does not have this wealth of secondary material on which one can draw.

All important occurrences and decisions relating to the Buddenbrooks family are interpreted and evaluated in the light of their bearing and impact on the business. As Holbeche (1988: 230) points out, since the founding of the grain firm in 1768 until its liquidation after the death of Thomas, the varying history of the family is closely associated with that of the firm. Indeed, the progress of the one is in many ways identical to the other, with the prestige of the family in Lübeck having a lot to do with the liquidity of the firm.

The decline of the family is linked by a series of scenes in which, with ever decreasing success, the current head of the family attempts to ward off threats to the family's financial well-being. These scenes are linked by the narrator and involve each of the three generations. In this respect, marriages and deaths are of major significance. For instance, Gotthold Buddenbrook's demands for money are rejected. Not only has he married beneath him, but he makes things worse by asking for money. What he should have done, according to the family, is to have married into a wealthy family and brought capital into the family. Next comes the Grünlich affair with respect to his marriage to Tony. After this, there is the costly inheritance of Clara and finally, the seemingly financially trivial, but ultimately decisive conflict between Thomas and Christian.

Then there is the money that the Buddenbrooks lose when a firm they deal with goes bankrupt during the Austrian-Prussian war of 1866. There is also the sale for the crop from Mecklenburg which goes sour. Competition with the Hagenström family provides yet another element to the commercial saga.

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Of particular interest are the *international* business grain trading activities of the Buddenbrooks firm. Business interests extend from Russia and Sweden to England and Holland. There are also close ties to Stockholm, London and Edinburgh. The firm purchases grain in the Lübeck and Mecklenburg areas and transports them with their own small fleet, at first on sail boats and later under power of steam. In the 1870's the fleet is modernised. Storage of the grain is also a significant aspect of managing the business, and there are storage houses in the harbour area. The young Thomas Buddenbrook suggests that the firm diversify beyond grain into other areas. This idea is forbidden by his father, Johann. Through this element of business development, themes such as diversification, specialisation and risk, lending and borrowing and the raising of capital are encountered, perennial business issues as pertinent today as they were then. Thomas Buddenbrook's official, senatorial activities provide insight into public finance and its relationship with private enterprise. Even the stock market and postal services are included in the remarkably wide commercial span of the novel.

### **Business Stress**

A major theme of the book is the psychological and emotional impact on individual family members caused by the demands of the firm (Holbeche 1988: 234). Stress and coping with it is a major theme in business life in any country and this theme is thus of both historical and contemporary interest. Particularly interesting as a basis for comparison with the 1990's is the constant pressure on the male members of the Buddenbrooks family to perform and be successful. (The stress is still there, more than ever perhaps, and at more levels of the business bureaucracy, but male-female roles have changed dramatically.) This is of major significance for the heads of the firm, who show, increasingly, that they are neither physically nor mentally up to their jobs. The one exception is the elder Johann Buddenbrook, for whom running the business evidently comes naturally. Thomas certainly applies himself assiduously to the task, but does not have the intrinsic and durable work ethic and ethos possessed by his father. For Thomas, the responsibility is excessive, and coping with tough competition becomes intolerable for him. Immediately after Joseph's death, Thomas revives the firm with his great enthusiasm and by taking out new credits in order to expand the business. The profit earned in this period is indeed substantial. However, this does not last, and Thomas' decision to build a new house marks, simultaneously, the turning point in both his own personal fortune and that of the business. In the following eleven years until his death, he is plagued by business worries, commencing with the unfavourable purchase of a large quantity of rye. Successive events then show Thomas' inability to maintain a dynamic and successful business enterprise.

Although the firm brings prestige and a luxurious life to the family, several other members fall victim to it, specifically, Tony, Christian and Hanno. Frequently in the novel, personal preferences and interests are subordinate to those of the firm. Jean's over-exuberant attitude towards Grünlich's marriage proposal is a good case in point. The high priority given to business interests leads to bitter internal and external conflict. This is also evident in the conflict between Johann and Gotthold in turning down Gotthold's claim for compensation for his share of the Mengstraßenhaus and his unfair treatment in comparison to Jean's sister. Hanno is a particularly sad case in terms of the family's desperation to continue the business tradition. Despite Thomas' dream that Hanno will perform in the mould of the successful and



robust Johann Buddenbrook, the fate of the firm is of no great concern to Hanno. In fact, the constant pressure, put on him by his father, finally destroys Hanno utterly. Thus, the balance between personal ambitions and happiness in contrast with the pressures and welfare of the family are significant in the book and bases for meaningful discussion.

### **Inheritance**

Several short segments of the book can be used to convey the vocabulary and idiom of inheritance and retirement. The reader is informed about the state of capital in the firm and family; growth due to dowry, loss through inheritance and compensation and so on. The head of the family has to be particularly circumspect when it comes to dowry (for Jean's sister in Frankfurt, for Clara, Erika and twice for Tony). Inheritance is also an issue after the death of Johann, Jean and the consul (the Konsulin, Elisabeth Buddenbrook). Gerda Buddenbrook, on the other hand, makes a contribution of 300 000 Kurantmark to the business. Thomas Buddenbrook's will, Tony's dowry, the cost of the new Buddenbrooks house and the sale of the old one, all provide situations which remain current and useful with respect to modern business.

### **Ethics**

Johann Buddenbrook comments to his son that business zeal must always be tempered by the condition that one ought to be able to sleep peacefully at night. Johann's attitudes also represent the so-called "Protestant ethic" which is significant in the organisational writings of Max Weber. When Weber published his *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905) and in a similar vein, R. H. Tawney his *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* in 1934, Mann "...recognised the affinities with his own novel" (Ridley 1987: 27). This is evinced in the book when Jean, Thomas and Tony are so proud of the firm that it becomes elevated to the level of a fetish, almost a substitute (ersatz) religion.

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The family has a strong desire to maintain its prestige through the firm, but at the same time, there is a clear desire to conduct business in an ethical fashion. Christian's comment in his club that all businessmen are essentially rogues, therefore causes great consternation. This wild generalisation will no doubt generate discussion in any Business German class. It certainly brought the Buddenbrooks firm some discredit. Also on the converse side of the ethical coin, the loss of Clara's share of the family fortune to her husband Tiburtius shows Thomas "...how little it profits a man materially to be emotionally and intellectually sensitive" (Ridley 1987: 41). Also interesting in terms of the current and in fact ever-raging controversy surrounding arms sales and the German weapons industry is the fact that much of the wealth accumulated by Johann Buddenbrook derived from the need for grain and stores of the occupying French army in Lübeck.

### **Business and Non-Business Life**

For the purposes of teaching Business German and something about German in Business, the finer literary subtleties are of less significance than they would be in a conventional literature course, and the emphasis shifts very clearly from the other themes contemplated by the book

to those relating to business. Yet, there is much to be learned about life *in relation to business* even apart from the business issues *themselves*.

Because commerce is such a fundamental theme underpinning the novel, even essentially non-business subplots have *something* to say about business and life in a broader context. For instance, there is Gotthold Buddenbrook, who marries beneath his station and retires on the family money. Christian Buddenbrook is unsuccessful in business, lacking the drive, ambition and desire to devote himself at all to a conventional job. Christian is thus never able to establish himself as a business person at all. In the third chapter of Part 2, a parallel is drawn between the happy childhood of Thomas and Christian and the financial success of the firm.

### Some Didactics and Quotations

As demonstrated, there are many passages in the book that convey commercial content, vocabulary and idiom. Space constraints prevent my giving more than a few examples here. A good example of a section of the book which provides a useful commercial discussion is the conversation between the banker Kesselmeyer, Grünlich and Tony. In this somewhat unfortunate scenario in which the deception and fraud perpetrated by Grünlich is revealed, a variety of directly and indirectly commercial issues arise:

"Ich persönlich bin durch die Zinsen, die Sie hie und da zusammengekratzt haben, schon ungefähr auf meine Kosten gekommen ..." (Mann 1967: 157)

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Similarly, the Consul's railway dealings provide relevant material:

"Das hat schon diplomatische Kämpfe gekostet und wird noch welche kosten, bis sie in Kopenhagen die Konzession geben." (Mann 1967: 271)

A few pages further on, there are some commercially and Germanistically interesting discussions relating to the Buddenbrooks firm:

"So arbeitete er und zwang den Erfolg, denn sein Ansehen wuchs in der Stadt, und trotz der Kapitalsentziehungen durch Christians Etablierung und Tony's zweite Heirat hatte die Firma vortreffliche Jahre ... denn er wisse wohl, wie schwer es sei, ein größer zugeschnittenes Geschäft mit plötzlich stark vermindertem Kapital zu halten." (Mann 1967: 275)

Such passages occur to a greater or lesser extent throughout the book. If prudently used in class, they provide not only grammatical examples in context benefits and vocabulary, but fascinating insights into the business of that age in relation to the present.

Passages from an English translation can also be used, either together with the identical passage from the German or as an independent supplement. Depending on the German skills of the students and the approach taken in class, the appropriate blend of German and English can be found. Here is a sample from Wood's 1993 translation of a conversation between Frau Permaneder and Thomas:

"He needs the money, and he would like to arrange the matter in a friendly way. ... But stupid as I am, I know one thing: that you are a very different man from Father, and that when you took over the business you set quite a different breeze blowing, and since then you have done many things he would never have done." (Mann 1993: 403)

A parallel-text approach would, of course, be productive for students interested in business translation. In fact, for such students, it would be fascinating to compare two different English translations with one another and with the German original.

Of course, some of these issues occur somewhat peripherally in conversations or brief comments. Certain events are not considered in detail, but mentioned rather fleetingly, such as the anecdotes of Johann's earlier achievements and in the discussion of Lübeck's entry into the customs union. By the same token, some financial details such as the structure of the firm's capital, payment of workers or employees, and so on are not provided. After all, the fundamental concern of the novel is with the internal structure of a pre-eminent family of the bourgeoisie rather than economic development and industrial policy (Ludwig 1979: 48). Ludwig (1979: 47) points out that the leading characters in the novel are not really portrayed as business people or politicians, but rather as actors in a tableau with complex and sophisticated motivations. Because of this detailed treatment of people, it is sometimes unclear if the policies of the Buddenbrooks are conducted out of economic rationality or personal conviction. It is just that which makes the characters meaningful and such useful points of reference and discussion as opposed to the kind of material obtained in a text book. None of this, though, detracts from the constant aura of business in the work as a whole.

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All in all, *Buddenbrooks* is a fine work even viewed rather calculatingly and narrowly as an aid to Business German and Regional Studies. The point is that it provides such a rich portrait of the era and so many business lessons, quite apart from vocabulary and idiom, that, appropriately used, it is a quite remarkable tool, with many resources which instructions can draw on as much or as little as they desire.

Finally, it should be mentioned that there is a German television adaptation of *Buddenbrooks* (Taurus Filmkollektion 1979, a co-production of the *Hessische Rundfunk* and Taurus Film) which provides a lively and quite accurate adaptation of the novel. This can be a useful supplement to teaching. There is also an audio-tape reading of the novel available from Deutsche Grammophon.

## **B. Lion Feuchtwanger's *Die Geschwister Oppermann***

Although not quite a classic of the stature of the *Buddenbrooks*, *Die Geschwister Oppermann* is, nonetheless, a major work of fiction. The novel has been highly successful, also in translation, and amongst its many republications was one in the U.S. in 1983 when it reached the bestseller lists. In fact, Thalheim (1994: 29) comments that next to Thomas Mann, Feuchtwanger is one of the most frequently translated German-speaking writers in the 20th century.

**Lion**



## Feuchtwanger's *Die Geschwister Oppermann*

The plot revolves around the Oppermann family which owns a successful furniture business, somewhat reminiscent of *Buddenbrooks*. Also in a similar fashion, the novel has many facets, subplots and messages. The Oppermanns' furniture factory run by Martin provides the basis of the family's wealth, but other important subplots cover the career of Edgar, a highly respected doctor and Gustav, who is a writer and working on a biography of Lessing. Gustav, is *de jure* the senior manager of the firm, but understands nothing of big business. Other members of the family accept his inactivity and literary ambitions, and it is more or less an unwritten law that the younger brother Martin really manages the business and its branches. Jacques (not a member of the Oppermann family) runs several of the larger furniture shops and is financially dependent on the Oppermanns. Also of interest to students would be the subplot relating to Martin Opperman's son Berthold. His idealism ultimately leads to him to suicide in the face of humiliation from the Nazi teacher Vogelsang.

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Much of the novel is concerned directly with the Oppermanns' trials and tribulations at the hands of the Nazis, but the commercial element is woven firmly and consistently into the plot. Furthermore, there is also a link between the commercial and the political, such as the planned Aryanisation of the firm and the actions taken in this respect. This subplot is one that students are likely to find of particular interest. "Aryanisation" here refers to the process of enriching in particular Nazi party members through ruining the Jewish community financially, "die Entjudung der deutschen Wirtschaft." In 1920, Hitler claimed that he would break up the capitalistic monopoly. However, when it came to the crunch German capital was left alone; Hitler in fact allied himself with industry, but German-Jewish capital was confiscated. Various professions were forbidden to Jews; they were no longer allowed to use bank accounts freely, and so on. Feuchtwanger's fictional character Heinrich Wels takes full advantage of this scenario. Embittered by his minimal success compared to the Oppermanns, he allies himself with the Nazis and becomes one of the great capitalists of the Third Reich, eventually having full control over the Oppermanns' businesses.

There is clearly much to discuss here, such the failure of the German bourgeoisie in the final stages of the Weimar Republic and of humanism in the face of the Nazi barbarism (von Sternburg 1994: 382). The book in fact covers many aspects of Nazi Germany, German-Jewish bourgeoisie and German-Jewish society in the thirties as a whole, anti-Semitism, economic policy, justice, the press, education and the role of women. Through the medium of a novel, Feuchtwanger provides a clear and analytical picture of Germany, and conveys vividly the criminal overtones of the National Socialist regime and its hangers-on, including those in business.

From the Business German point of view, the book abounds with grammatical structures and discussions that are useful:

*"Wer bei Oppermann kauft, kauft gut und billig, war ein geflügeltes Wort. Überall im Reich arbeiteten Deutsche an Oppermannschen Tischen, aßen von Oppermannschen Tischen, saßen auf Oppermannschen Stühlen, schliefen in*

Opermannschen Betten." (Feuchtwanger 1991: 22).

For students, these two sentences provide some useful prepositions, and of course, make the point about the prevalence of Jewish business in the Reich. Similarly, the following introduces the concept of pricing competition within the same racial context:

"Man mußte die Preise mindestens zehn Prozent niedriger halten als der nichtjüdische Konkurrent; hielt man sie nur fünf Prozent niedriger, dann gab es Leute, die zum Christen gingen." (Feuchtwanger 1991: 22).

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This sentence shows how to write a percentage, has a comparison and a relative clause. In other words, sentences and paragraphs of this kind provide a wealth of vocabulary and grammar within the framework of business, as well as a stimulus to a discussion of business during the Third Reich in relation to today.

*Die Geschwister Oppermann* has also been turned into a television film, and a good one at that. Apart from the fact that portions or the entire series can be shown to students, the script is also available in print (Monk 1982). At 162 pages, this is a far shorter read for students and can also complement the book well. Some of the dialogues, again on the Aryanisation issue, provide relatively straightforward Business German:

"Es wird sich nicht vermeiden lassen, daß unsere Absicht zu fusionieren in der Branche bekannt wird. ... Ich nehme an, daß Sie mit dem Einverständnis Ihrer Partei rechnen können. ... Dann wird liquidiert oder in die Deutschen Möbelwerke überführt." (Monk 1982: 118-119)

## C. Leonie Ossowski's *Die Maklerin*

Leonie Ossowski is a writer who has written several colourful, multifaceted and unpretentious novels which depict Germany's milieu in a frame of social criticism. Her background as a lawyer for the weak and socially deprived in society and her protest against a rigid bourgeoisie characterise much of her writing (von Wilpert: 1136) Ossowski's *Die Maklerin* is an exceptionally suitable novel for the purpose of teaching Business German and Regional Studies. The book is set primarily in Berlin and a major element of the storyline deals with big-city business around the Kurfürstendamm. The story commences in Riga, Latvia of 1925 but shifts to the Berlin of 1945 as a consequence of various historical and family-related events, including the Nazi relocation programme. The heroine (Dora) proceeds to take her life and career firmly in hand and finds the economic miracle of the Berlin in the fifties the ideal environment. She marries a successful businessman and has two children. Subsequently, she becomes a broker, successful in her own right, but driven by ambition, money and the desire to possess as much as possible. Life starts to turn sour, in particular due to an alleged murder committed many years ago before coming to Germany. She loses everything that she had worked so hard and ruthlessly to build up. As conveyed by the above, the plot tends towards melodrama, and the book is certainly not the literary equal of either *Buddenbrooks* or *Die Geschwister Oppermann*. However, as a

**Leonie  
Ossowski's *Die  
Maklerin***

conveyer of Business German and *Landeskunde*, it is extremely useful.

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The novel has many characteristics that make it ideal for the purpose of improving both Business German skills and describing Germany. The work spans the critical period of German history from World War II to the present, which includes both the *Wirtschaftswunder* of the fifties and sixties and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. The focus falls on the latter portion of twentieth century, and the atmosphere and environment of Berlin are conveyed well.

Business vocabulary and idiom abound in the book. From a grammatical point of view, the use of German is exemplary as a means of conveying the business idiom. The following sentence is a fine example:

"Unermüdlich studierte sie die Stellenangebote der Tageszeitungen und sprach beim Arbeitsamt vor, bis sie nach Wochen in einer Immobilienfirma als Empfangsdame und Telefonistin eingestellt wurde. ... Nur bekam sie auf Grund eines fehlenden Berufsabschlusses kein attraktives Gehalt." (Ossowski 1994: 141)

Another example:

"Wen darf ich melden? fragte die Sekretärin höflich, und Dora nannte ihren Namen, nicht den der Firma, bei der sie angestellt war." (Ibid., p. 146).

There are several complex constructions here which would be worth discussing. Furthermore, business processes, including less-than-scrupulous wheeling and dealing, are dealt with in an imaginative and entertaining fashion. It is precisely this kind of unusual but realistic portrayal of business that cannot be provided by a conventional business text.

Students can be given a variety of exercises based on the book. One possibility is for them to go through the book and select those sentences which deal with business situations and to translate them and/or discuss their significance in terms of their own knowledge of business.

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## Conclusion

This article is based on the premise that the teaching of Business German and Regional Studies can be powerfully and productively supplemented by the judicious use of literature. While certainly not a complete or even near-perfect substitute for a conventional approach, there is considerable benefit to be derived both by students and instructor if at least some effort is made to integrate literature into courses. Literature can introduce a vitality and vision of the present or past, as well as psychological and sociological insights into both business and day-to-day life in Germany that go beyond what can be offered by standard texts. Students and instructors alike will find it reasonably straightforward and stimulating to compare and project the past as depicted in the novels, with the present.

By virtue of translations, plot summaries and assistance from the instructor, it is not essential or even really necessary for students to read an entire work. Thus, a variety of approaches is feasible, from an entire novel to even a few paragraphs. If tuned to the needs and expectations of the group, a blend of literature and more usual sources can enrich and enhance Business German and Regional Studies considerably. Especially for instructors with a literary background, the appeal of this approach should be substantial.

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